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ABSTRACT

This study examined the issue of how the inclusion of students with disabilities is being achieved in the midst of the high-stakes testing environment of south Texas. Using a questionnaire mailed to general and special education teachers and school administrators, the study examined attitudes and practices concerning inclusion and testing. Responses were received from: 286 regular education teachers (35.3%); 91 special education teachers (45.5%); and 164 administrators (45.3%). Findings suggest that educators may benefit from a more thorough understanding of the concept of the least restrictive environment. Administrators indicate they were very knowledgeable about the provisions of the least restrictive environment guidelines and were interested in including students with disabilities in regular education classes. Regular education teachers were less familiar with the least restrictive environment and were less interested in having a student with a disability in their classrooms. Only 67% of special education teachers indicated confidence in their own understanding of the least restrictive environment. Findings also show few formalized collaborative partnerships to help with student inclusion. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

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Including Students with Disabilities and Achieving Accountability: Educators' Emerging Challenge

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Abstract

The nation-wide movement toward increased accountability in our schools has been implemented in large part through state-mandated standardized testing of students. The state assessments in Texas, as in many states, have a powerful influence on educators' decisions and practices. Whether or not students with special learning needs are provided with an educational experience in the least restrictive environment is dependent upon the decisions and actions of educators. The high-stakes testing agenda in Texas influences decisions related to the inclusion of students with special learning needs. In this article, we examine the issue of how the inclusion of students with disabilities is being achieved in the midst of the high-stakes testing environment of south Texas. Using a questionnaire mailed to general and special education teachers along with school administrators, we examine educators' attitudes/practices concerning inclusion and testing.

Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees children with disabilities the right to a free appropriate public education in the "least restrictive environment." The least restrictive environment is a concept based on the consideration of each individual student's unique abilities and needs. It specifies that the student's educational program must be as much like "regular education" as possible. This implies "integration" or being taught among one's peers.

With the enactment of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975 educators became responsible for teaching all students, including those with disabilities, in as normal an educational setting as possible. The extent to which each student with a disability is receiving his or her education within regular education classrooms is addressed within the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for that student.

The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 (Public Law 101-476) clarifies and strengthens the original concept of the least restrictive environment (Snyder, Garriott & Aylor, 2001). In the United States today, students with disabilities are increasingly being educated in the general education classrooms of our public schools. According to the United States Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in 1998-99 approximately 11% of the our nation's students 6 to 17 years of age were served under the provisions of this law. Almost half of these students were served in the regular classroom 80% of the day or more (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Our nation's system of education is a "state-administered" system. State standards and testing have become the focal points in schools across our nation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 stipulates statewide accountability systems based upon challenging academic content and achievement standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The interpretation and enactment of the least restrictive environment concept is also the responsibility of each state. Students with special learning needs do not fit neatly into the elected state leaders' and educators' efforts to produce high standardized test scores. "State assessments . . . have put pressure on school districts to standardize and emphasize content at the expense of any other concerns" (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000).

Educators are increasingly raising concerns about how important issues such as multicultural education, multiple intelligences, character education, collaborative networks, service learning and others fit with the state-mandated standardized testing agenda (Bigelow, 1999; Bohn & Sleeter, 2000; ERIC/OSEP,2002; Glickman, 2000/2001; Kohn, 2001). Providing the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities may be a secondary concern in schools where educators feel pressure to achieve high scores on standardized tests.

In the State of Texas the high-stakes testing agenda looms large. Students' results on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)[1] have become the primary indicator of success (or lack of success) for students, teachers, administrators and school systems. Is the emphasis on a statewide curriculum and standardized assessments that are measured by paper/pencil testing congruent with the provisions of IDEA for students with special learning needs? Is a high-stakes testing agenda compatible with the concept of the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities?

The new standards and accountability systems have presented new challenges for educators striving to provide an inclusive educational experience for students with special learning needs. Even students with disabilities that have been traditionally exempted from standardized testing are now expected to participate and benefit from

the states' accountability systems (Johnson, 2000). In 2001 the Texas Education Agency moved to include more students that are receiving special education into the state accountability testing program. Either the traditional TAAS or the State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA) is now required of all students receiving special education unless they are exempted from the state testing according to their IEP.

While Texas has assumed a leading role as our nation moves to achieve educational accountability through state assessments, the implementation of the least restrictive environment for Texas students with disabilities appears to be lagging. In the 22nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the United States Department of Education (2000) reported that nation-wide in 1998-99 over 46% of the students with disabilities, ages 6 to 21, were taught in classes outside of a general education classroom for just 20% or less of the school day.

In Texas, students with disabilities have a different school experience. While across our nation nearly one-half of all students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their school day in general education classes, only 26% of the same-age Texas students with disabilities spend an equal amount of time in the general education classrooms of their schools. Neighboring states of Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma taught 40%, 71%, 36%, 36% and 50%, respectively, of their same-age students with disabilities outside of the general education classroom for 20% or less of the school day. In other words, the State of Texas trails its neighboring states, as well as most of the states across the nation in the extent that it educates its students with disabilities in regular education classrooms.

Students with specific learning disabilities are included in the general education classes of Texas to a significantly lesser extent than are students with all disabilities in Texas. Only 16% of Texas students with learning disabilities spend 80% or more of their school day in general education classes. Meanwhile, students with learning disabilities in the neighboring states of Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma, are taught in general education classes 80% or more of the school day at rates ranging from 28 to 76% (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). What are the factors contributing to the fewer minutes Texas students with disabilities spend in the general education classrooms of their schools when compared with same-age students with disabilities in other locations in the United States? Might the degree to which the State of Texas emphasizes accountability through state-mandated assessments be a factor?

Teachers are subject to the policies of the state and school in which they work, while at the same time having tremendous power and influence among their students. The general education teacher plays a major role in the inclusion of students with

special learning needs in the mainstream classroom. Treder, Morse & Ferron (2000) recently stated, "Regular education teachers' acceptance is a critical component in how this type of service delivery will play out. . . . Research has indicated that the level of responsibility a teacher will assume for educating students with behavior or learning problems is related to specific attitudes that the teacher holds."

Students with disabilities typically face many barriers in their educational experience, but the attitudinal barriers of teachers often present the greatest challenges (Pivik, McComas & LaFlamme, 2002). Teachers' attitudes and expectations towards students with disabilities can be positively altered when schools prioritize inclusive educational programming by supporting collaboration and teamwork among teachers (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). How does a school's efforts to include students with disabilities compliment its efforts to demonstrate high quality through standardized test results? This is an important question educators in Texas and across our nation must address if the ideals of the least restrictive environment are to be realized in the midst of the current high-stakes testing agenda.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to investigate similarities and differences in the attitudes of administrators, regular education teachers, and special education teachers in south Texas about the TAAS test and the inclusion of special education students in the regular classroom.

Specific research questions for the study were:

- Do administrators, regular education teachers, and special education teachers differ in their attitudes about special education students about special education students and their inclusion in the regular education classroom.
- Do administrators, regular education teachers, and special education teachers differ in their attitudes toward the TAAS and its impact on regular and special education students.

Method

Participants

The accessible population for the study was six school districts in a metropolitan area of south Texas. The districts ranged in size from 1,800 to 40,000. All had at least 70% Hispanic students and 5% black students. Since the accessible population and resulting sample are not representative of the state of Texas, the generalizability of the results is limited to districts with characteristics that are similar to those of the sample. In order to select the sample, directories from each of the six school districts were used

to identify and categorize educators as "regular education teachers," "special education teachers," or "administrators." A stratified random sample technique was used to insure adequate representation of the three groups. The sample was selected according to the following percentages: 25% of the regular education teachers, 50% of the special education teachers, and 100% of the building principals and deans of instruction.

The number of surveys mailed to the three groups of educators, along with the rates of return are as follows:

- regular education teachers – 811 surveys mailed; 286 returned (35.3%).
- special education teachers – 200 surveys mailed; 91 returned (45.5%)
- administrators – 362 surveys mailed, 164 surveys returned (45.3%)

Return rates were less than 50% for all three groups. However, the data collection procedure used to distribute the surveys may have contributed to the low return rate. Schools selected to participate received a mailed packet of surveys for teachers, special education teachers, and administrators. The principal was asked to distribute the surveys to his/her staff, then collect the completed surveys and return them to the authors. The degree to which the principal demonstrated an interest in having the teachers return the surveys likely influenced the rate of return for the school. Ideally, a sample of teachers and administrators who did not respond to the survey should have been followed up with a telephone interview to determine if the non-responders were in some way different from the responders. However, since the surveys were completed and returned anonymously, the authors had no way of following up with individual teachers or administrators who declined to complete a survey.

Instrument

A locally developed cross-sectional survey instrument was developed for the study. The survey consisted of 18 questions, 10 of which dealt with attitudes of the respondents and 8 of which dealt with demographic and background information of the respondents. The questions dealing with respondent attitudes were grouped in two general categories:

- attitudes about special education students and their inclusion in the regular education classroom.
- attitudes toward the TAAS and its impact on regular and special education students.

Three forms of the survey instrument were developed; one for each of the three groups (administrator, special education teacher, and regular education teacher). The

questions on the three forms were identical except for slight variations in three of the questions. The variations were intended to make these questions more compatible with the respondents' assignments. For example, administrators and regular education teachers were asked "do you want students with disabilities in your classes?" while special education teachers were asked "do you want students with disabilities included in regular education classes."

A Likert scale was used for six of the items because these items measured attitudes which the authors viewed as a continuous variable. Four of the items used a dichotomous scale ("yes-no" format) because the authors were interested in the respondents' choosing one side or the other (e.g. Is the TAAS a good measure of your students' learning?) rather than determining the degree to which they held the belief.

Results

A cross-sectional survey research design was used to collect the data. A packet consisting of surveys for administrators, special education teachers, and regular education teachers was sent to each school in the sample. All returned surveys were entered into an SPSS database for analysis.

Two sets of analyses were used to compare the responses for the three groups. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for the items that were Likert scaled while a chi-square analysis was used on the items requiring "yes-no" responses. In addition, qualitative data were collected on two items via respondent comments.

Research Question 1: Do administrators, regular education teachers, and special education teachers differ in their attitudes about special education students about special education students and their inclusion in the regular education classroom?

Survey items for the first research question explored teacher and administrator attitudes toward special education students and their inclusion in the regular classroom. Four of the questions were considered to have an underlying continuous distribution and were analyzed with a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). Eta-squared (η^2), a measure of effect size, was calculated in order to determine if differences were educationally meaningful. For η^2, a value of .01 was small, .06 was medium, and .14 was large (Green, 2003).

The ANOVA ($F = 47.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .150$) indicated that there were significant differences among the three groups about "least restrictive environment." Pair-wise post hoc analyses were calculated in order to determine which groups differed in their attitudes. Post hoc analyses indicated that administrators had a significantly greater degree of familiarity with "least restrictive environment" than did regular

education teachers. Special education teachers were asked how familiar regular education teachers were with the concept. They felt that regular education teachers were significantly less familiar with "least restrictive environment" than regular education teachers felt themselves to be. There was a large effect size, indicating that there was a meaningful difference between the groups.

The three groups also differed significantly on the question of including children with disabilities in the regular classroom ($F = 80.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .236$). The post hoc analyses also showed that special education teachers and administrators were highly supportive of the inclusion of special education students in the regular classroom and were significantly more likely than regular education teachers to want students with disabilities in the regular classroom. The effect size for this question (_ ^{2} = .236) indicates that there is a large and meaningful difference between regular teachers and the administrators and special education teachers.

There were significant differences on the question of instructional modifications for students with disabilities ($F = 45.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .147$). Post hoc analyses revealed that administrators were strongly in favor of supporting regular education teachers in developing instructional modifications while special education teachers were significantly less likely to provide assistance to the regular teacher. Furthermore, regular education teachers were least likely to be in favor of providing instructional modifications to children with disabilities. The results indicate that while administrators favor supporting the regular teacher, special education teachers do not view assisting the regular teacher in providing instructional modification as part of their job and classroom teachers are not in favor of making instructional modifications for children with disabilities.

The final question dealt with expectations for children with disabilities. The ANOVA indicated an overall difference among the groups ($F = 24.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .086$). The Post hoc analyses showed that administrators and special education teachers were significantly more likely than regular education teacher to have high expectations for these students. The effect size (_ ^{2} = .086) was interpreted as "medium," indicating that the differences were meaningful.

Table 1
Comparison of Regular Education Teachers, Special Education teachers, and Administrators Attitudes Concerning Teaching Students with Disabilities

Question	F	p	df	η^2
1. Familiarity with "least restrictive environment"	47.01	.000**	2	.150
Post Hoc Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers		.000**		
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.000**		
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.000**		
2. Desirability of including students with disabilities in regular education classes	80.90	.000**	2	.236
Post Hoc Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers		.000**		
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.251		
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.000**		
3. Providing assistance and support to regular education teachers in developing instructional modifications for students with disabilities	45.51	.000**	2	.147
Post Hoc Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers		.001**		
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.001**		
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.031*		
4. Do you have high expectations for students with disabilities?	24.83	.001**	2	.086
Post Hoc Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers		.000**		
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers		1.000		
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.000**		

Note. The Tamane test was used for post hoc comparisons. *p<.05. **p<.01

Two questions dealt with the positive and negative aspects of inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular classroom. Since these questions had a "yes-no" format, a chi-square analysis was used to compare the response patterns of the three groups. In addition, the Cramer's V coefficient was calculated to determine the effect size. For the Cramer's V, a value of .1 was small, .3 was medium, and .5 was a large effect size.

The chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 31.09, p < .001$) indicated that there were significant differences between the groups concerning the positive aspects of including students with disabilities in the regular classroom (Table 2). The Cramer's V of .259 was a medium effect size and indicated that the differences were meaningful. Pairwise

comparisons of the three groups indicated that administrators and special education teachers were significantly more likely to view inclusion as positive than were regular teachers. Over 80% of the special education teachers and 77% of the administrators felt that inclusion had positively affected student learning in their classrooms. Administrators and special education teachers gave similar reasons for their position such as including students enhances everyone's self-esteem, thereby promoting learning and that learning occurs in a social context where students learn from one another.

Although only 55% of the regular education teachers felt that inclusion of students with disabilities positively affected student learning in their classrooms. They described the benefits of inclusion as opportunities to teach tolerance in the classroom, providing a more real-world social experience, along with peer tutoring possibilities.

There were also some negative aspects to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular classroom. The chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 12.13$, $p < .01$) indicated that there were significant differences in the response patterns for the three groups. However, the Cramer's V value was .663, indicating a small effect size. Pairwise comparisons showed that a significantly greater proportion of the special education teachers and regular education teachers believed that inclusion had, in some ways, negatively affected student learning in the regular education classroom. Slightly over one-third of the teachers indicated that that inclusion had a negative effect. Regular education teachers concerns included reducing the teacher's time for other students, causing a slower pace of instruction, and too much of the teacher's time spent on discipline. Special education teachers had concerns about students who might not function well in regular education settings even with modifications, as well as situations where students who are in regular education classes might be uncomfortable leaving class for special help in resource rooms.

In contrast, administrators were less likely to feel that inclusion had a negative on student learning. Those administrators who did feel that there were negative aspects to inclusion gave reasons that were generally similar to those given by the teachers. They included the drain on a teacher's time for a few with special needs at the expense of the other students in the class, plus the negative effect of difficult to handle behavior problems.

Table 2
Comparison of Regular Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers, and Administrators Attitudes Concerning Students With Disabilities and the TAAS Test

Question	F	p	df	η^2
1. Does the TAAS improve student motivation for learning?	9.65	.001**	2	.036
Post Hoc Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers		.000**		
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.003**		
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.976		
2. Does the TAAS affect inclusion practices in your school?	7.231	.001**	2	.030
Post Hoc Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers		.244		
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.000**		
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers		.022*		

Note. The Tamane test was used for post hoc comparisons. *p<.05. **p<.01

Research Question 2: Do administrators, regular education teachers, and special education teachers differ in their attitudes toward the TAAS and its impact on regular and special education students?

In Texas, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is required, with few exceptions, for all students in grades 3-8 and grade 10. It is considered a high stakes test and is a graduation requirement for all non-exempt students. In addition, the test results are used to rate the academic performance of schools and is often a consideration in teacher and administrator evaluations. In this atmosphere of high stakes testing, a key concern among teachers and administrators alike is the assessment of children with disabilities. Since children with disabilities often perform less satisfactorily on the TAAS, pressure to achieve a high pass rate may conflict with decisions on whether to test these children. In order to determine their feelings about the TAAS, teachers and administrators were asked to express their feelings about its value as a measure of student achievement and teacher quality and its motivational power. Finally, they were asked whether the TAAS affected the inclusion practices in their schools.

Two questions dealt with the value of the TAAS as a measure of student learning and as an indicator of teaching quality. Since these questions had a "yes-no" format, a chi-square analysis was used to compare the response patterns of the three

groups. In addition, the Cramer's V coefficient was calculated to determine the effect size.

The chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 27.19$, $p < .001$) indicated that there were significant differences between the groups about how well the TAAS measured student learning (Table 3). The Cramer's V value of .233 was a small to medium effect size and indicated that the differences were meaningful. Pairwise comparisons of the three groups indicated that administrators were significantly more likely to view the TAAS as a good measure of student learning than were either special education teachers or regular teachers. Over 75% of the regular education teachers and over 80% of the special education teachers were of the opinion that the TAAS was not a good measure of their students' learning. Administrators, on the other hand, were almost equally divided on whether it was a good measure of student learning.

There were also significant differences between the groups about whether the TAAS results reflected the quality of teaching in the classroom ($\chi^2 = 31.78$, $p < .001$). Pairwise ad hoc analyses showed that administrators were significantly more likely to feel that the TAAS results reflected the quality of teaching and instruction in the classroom than were teachers. This result is somewhat misleading. Even though their responses differed significantly from the teachers, only 38% of the administrators believed that the TAAS did reflect the quality of instruction in their classrooms. Teachers were more emphatic in their rejection of the view that TAAS results were indicative of the quality of teaching and instruction. Over 80% of the regular education teachers and 88% of the special education teachers indicated that it was not.

Table 3
Comparison of Regular Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers, and Administrators Attitudes Concerning TAAS as a Measure of Teaching and Learning

Question	χ^2	p	df	Cramer's V
1. Is the TAAS a good measure of your students' learning?	27.185	.000**	2	.233
Pair Wise Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers	20.58	.000**	1	.221
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers	16.47	.000**	1	.263
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers	1.05	.360	1	.055
2. Does the TAAS reflect the quality of teaching and instruction in your school?	31.78	.000**	2	.253
Pair-Wise Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers	23.37	.000**	1	.236
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers	18.09	.000**	1	.276
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers	1.46	.227	1	.066

Note. The Chi-square statistic was used for Pair-Wise comparisons. *p<.05. **p<.01.

The final questions dealt with the motivational impact of the TAAS on student learning and the degree to which the TAAS affects inclusion practices. A univariate analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences between the groups on the motivational impact of the TAAS ($F = 9.65$, $p < .001$). However, the effect size ($\eta^2 = .036$) was small, and indicated that the differences between the groups may not be educationally significant. Pairwise comparisons showed that administrators were significantly more likely to feel that the TAAS improved motivation for learning than did either regular or special education teachers.

Finally, there were significant differences between the groups on the degree to which the TAAS affects inclusion practices ($F = 7.23$, $p < .001$). However the effect size was small ($\eta^2 = .030$), and indicates that the differences between groups may not be educationally significant. Post hoc analyses showed that special education teachers were significantly more likely to feel that the TAAS affected inclusion practices than either administrators or regular teachers.

Table 4
Comparison of Regular Education Teachers, Special Education teachers, and Administrators Attitudes Concerning Inclusion of Children With Disabilities in the Regular Education Classroom

Question	χ^2	p	df	Cramer's V

1. Has inclusion of children with disabilities in you classroom positively affected student learning?	31.09	.000**	2	.259
Pair-Wise Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers	19.84	.000**	1	.226
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers	.944	.331	1	.065
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers	18.37	.000**	1	.242
2. Has inclusion of children with disabilities negatively affected student learning in your school?	12.13	.002**	2	.163
Pair-Wise Comparisons				
Administrators vs. Regular Ed. Teachers	11.91	.001**	1	.176
Administrators vs. Special Ed. Teachers	3.65	.056	1	.130
Regular Ed. vs. Special Ed. Teachers	.548	.459	1	.042

Note. The Chi-square statistic was used for Pair-Wise comparisons. *p<.05. **p<.01.

Discussion

Providing a quality educational experience for students with disabilities is a complex, challenging endeavor. We know educators' beliefs and practices vary widely on this issue. Whether or not these differences of opinion are useful is contingent upon them being well-informed. Our data suggests that all educators may benefit from a more thorough understanding of the concept of the least restrictive environment.

Administrators indicated that they were knowledgeable concerning the provisions of the least restrictive environment and were interested in including students with disabilities in regular education classes. The regular education teachers were less familiar with what the least restrictive environment meant and were much less interested in having a student with a disability in their classroom. Given the different responsibilities of regular education teachers and administrators these differences are not surprising. Of greater concern is that the only 67% of the special education teachers indicated confidence in their own understanding of the least restrictive environment. As instructional leaders, administrators may need to take a more proactive approach to promoting an understanding of what the least restrictive environment means in the context of their schools.

The reauthorization of IDEA suggests that increased collaboration among educators is called for in order to more effectively provide the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. While administrators supported the principle of a collaborative teaching effort between regular and special education teachers, in actual practice little, if any, formalized collaborative teaching partnerships were occurring. Transitioning from previous patterns of teaching ingrained in schools, may

be best accomplished through informal, voluntary partnerships among a few like-minded educators that have administrative support rather than system-wide changes.

The influence of state-mandated standardized testing on students, educators and school systems is immense. As has been suggested by Kohn (2001), the stress of these high-stakes assessments gets passed downward in the school's educational hierarchy. The state places the burden on the administrators, who in turn pass it on to the teachers and finally the responsibility for the "status" of all concerned lies in the hands of the children. This situation is troubling enough without factoring in how students with disabilities might affect the test results.

Teachers, both general and special education alike, viewed the TAAS effect on students' motivation to learn much more negatively than did administrators. Special educators felt strongly that the TAAS impacted the inclusion practices, or lack of them, within their schools. With so much riding on the outcome of a paper-pencil, standardized test it is not surprising that the ideal of providing an individualized education program for a student with disabilities in the mainstream of the school has become a low priority. Only half of the regular education teachers reported that they held high expectations for students with disabilities. These low expectations and accompanying disinterest in teaching students with disabilities among regular education teachers may in part be a means of surviving the high-stakes testing agenda.

The disparity between the way administrators and teachers view the TAAS is reflected in how these two groups of educators see the TAAS as a measure of students' learning and teacher effectiveness. Many regular and special education teachers are faced with teaching in an environment where a TAAS preparation agenda is imposed upon the curriculum. Generally, TAAS preparation efforts constitute a "one size fits all" approach to instruction. This type of inclusion experience will be less likely to be of value for the student with a disability who may need a more individualized, varied instructional approach. Teachers may also find that their efforts to expedite their students' preparation for the TAAS could be complicated by students who need instructional modifications. Indeed, regular education teachers reported far less satisfaction concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes than did either administrators or special education teachers. With educators' publicly perceived effectiveness on the line, expediency and efficiency seem to override the principle of teaching *all* children.

The over-reliance upon standardized testing that is being used to hold teacher and administrators accountable has diminished the ability of educators to provide the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. Among the important questions facing today's educators is, "How will the guaranteed rights of students with

disabilities be enacted in our nation's schools in the midst educational accountability measured through state-mandated standardized testing?"

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Footnotes

[1]The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) will be replace the TAAS in 2003-04. As with the TAAS, the new TAKS is a state-mandated standardized test that will be used to determine student promotion from various grade levels and graduation from high school.

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